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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 12-66

SUBJECT: Implications of the Latest Congo Crisis

SUMMARY

The Congo as always is only a step from anarchy. President Mobutu has done little to alleviate its chronic woes, and his weaknesses as a leader are daily becoming more apparent. His main crutch, the Congolese National Army, is weak and in considerable disarray. Continued Belgian assistance is vital to the functioning of the government and economy, but Mobutu is conducting a clumsy vendetta against the Belgians in the name of Congolese economic independence, and of his own reputation as an African nationalist.

Mobutu probably does not mean to expel the Belgians from the Congo, but he is impulsive and may by rash action drive them to withdraw their aid or reduce it drastically. In this event, Mobutu would turn urgently to the US and other sources, but would be unlikely to get enough assistance to fill the gap. The result would be a further weakening of the Congo's rickety political structure.

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A. The Domestic Problem

1. The Congo in its seventh year of independence is plagued by most of the same ills which have afflicted it from the start. In most respects it is more an agglomeration of tribal, provincial, and foreign interests than a nation. Few Congolese political figures have gained any concept of national interest or national responsibility. Hardly more than a start has been made in developing the skilled and trained Congolese cadres needed at all levels and in all spheres of public activity. Corruption, inefficiency, and inertia still stymie the efforts of the central government to extend its writ to the hinterland. The capital has a new name, but is still beset by the same old economic, financial, and administrative confusion.

2. President Mobutu, who put himself in office eight months ago, lacks many of the political attributes and skills required for the almost impossible job of controlling his anarchic land. An unsophisticated soldier, he has little grasp of economic and administrative details, and is impatient with political problems. He often acts impulsively, without weighing alternatives or consequences. Unlike his predecessor, Moise Tshombe, he lacks charismatic appeal in any quarter, nor has he any secure

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regional political power base of his own. He relies upon his ability to keep political foes off-balance and divided, and upon his command of the Congolese National Army (ANC) and the Surete.

3. Mobutu has recently begun a campaign to enhance his image as an African nationalist at home and abroad. His objective is to undercut support for Tshombe and the rebels, to acquire new political followings, and to gain plaudits from his African colleagues. For example, he recently paid conspicuous public homage to the spirit of Patrice Lumumba, a man he once despised, and he is now courting the advice and support of latter-day Lumumbists. By draconian methods, including liberal use of the Surete and the ANC, he has gained far more control over provincial governments than any of his predecessors enjoyed. Yet he is doing virtually nothing to alleviate local problems, and the dissatisfaction of provincial political leaders with his performance is mounting in many key areas, e.g., Kivu, Katanga, and Kisangani (ex-Stanleyville).

4. The two-year old rebellion in the north and east is by no means ended, though it is quiescent. The rebels are disorganized and have withdrawn from the major towns and lines of

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communication, but rebel groups sometimes put up a stiff resistance when cornered, and have no disposition to lay down arms. They are held in check mainly by mercenary elements attached to the ANC. It is doubtful that the ANC could or would fight the rebels, if deprived of Belgian cadres or mercenary support. Mobutu frequently talks of sending the mercenaries home, and probably would like to do so, but he is well aware that without them the rebellion could quickly take on new life.

5. Moreover, events of the last few weeks give rise to grave doubts about the cohesion of the ANC and about Mobutu's command over it. The mutiny of a force of Katangan gendarmes against their ANC commander in Kisangani is indicative of the tensions prevailing in the Congolese armed forces. Indeed, there is a possibility of a general breakdown of authority and order in much of the country. Change can come suddenly in the Congo, and if Mobutu appears to be losing his grip, younger army officers and civilian political aspirants are waiting in the wings, and many of them are more radical and nationalistic than Mobutu. Or, serious and prolonged dissidence in a major province could afford an opportunity for the self-exiled Tshombe to re-enter the arena.

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B. The Confrontation with Belgium

6. Mobutu in recent months has turned sharply on the Belgians. In a complete reversal from his earlier close association with and reliance upon Belgian advisors, he has begun a series of harassments of Belgian business interests, has called for renegotiation of the basic financial agreements with Belgium, and has started a vitriolic radio and press campaign against Belgians in general. The worsening of relations with the former metropole raises serious doubts about the continuation of the Belgian aid, the preservation of order and stability, and Mobutu's own political survival. The importance to the Congolese of the continued Belgian presence can hardly be overstated, for it is largely due to Belgian military, technical, and economic aid that the Congo is not in even worse shape than it is.

7. The Belgians, too, have a considerable stake in the Congo. The bulk of the 35,000 resident Belgians are there to make money for themselves or for large Brussels-based companies. Belgian investment in the Congo, which amounts to some \$3 billion, is largely controlled by a complex network of holding companies and investment banks. Ocean shipping, airlines, internal

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transport, mining, construction, banking, and insurance are virtual Belgian preserves. Indeed, it is largely because Belgian private interests are so extensive that the Belgian government is willing to provide assistance to the Congo.

8. Relations between Belgium and its former colony have generally been cordial in recent years. Most Congolese governments have been too preoccupied with problems of internal order, or merely of survival, to take much stock of the Belgian economic presence. Mobutu seems to have discovered Belgian "exploitation" of the Congo while educating himself on his new functions as president. Since then his growing suspicions of Belgian activities in general have been nourished by a group of young Congolese intellectuals, graduates of Lovanium University, who replaced Belgian advisors in his entourage, and by other African rulers, e.g., President Nyerere of Tanzania and Kaunda of Zambia. Nyerere, in particular, is advising Mobutu to improve his African image by cutting some of the Congo's ties to the former metropole, diversifying aid requests among other potential donors, and playing off interested foreign powers against each other.

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9. Mobutu is likely to persist in his efforts to achieve a greater measure of economic independence from Belgium. Though he claims to understand the importance of Belgian economic, technical, and military aid, and of Belgian expertise in management and public services, he is impulsive by nature, and often acts precipitately without fully weighing the consequences. Hence, new Belgian-Congolese confrontations may arise at any time. Mobutu is not inflexible and will probably not consciously seek a complete severance of ties. The danger is that he may not recognize the limits of Belgian patience and that he may overestimate Belgian willingness to assist the Congolese under drastically altered conditions.

10. For the Belgians, the next few months are likely to be difficult. If they are to retain the substance of their economic interests, they will have to yield some of the trappings of economic control to the Congolese and learn to conduct business under less favorable terms than before. For many individual Belgians, the belated transition to post-colonial economic relations will be a searing experience. Some will blame the US for instigating Congolese actions against them, and will suspect the US of wishing to replace Belgium as the predominant

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economic power in the Congo. It is unlikely that major Belgian private interests will voluntarily withdraw from the Congo; their investments are too large and the returns, even under less favorable arrangements, will still be too attractive.

11. However, if relations deteriorate rapidly, Brussels might show its disapproval by stronger diplomatic moves, extending perhaps to a full-scale break in relations. To the extent that such pressures were intended to force Mobutu to a more amenable position, they would almost certainly be endorsed or even instigated by the major Belgian business interests in the Congo. But if the Belgian government so hardened its position that its aims were to bring down Mobutu, business interests would probably be divided, some advocating extreme measures, and others advising caution.

12. In any case, there would probably be a considerable reduction of assistance to the Congo, and some disruption of services now performed by Belgians, e.g., Sabena Airline. The situation would be complicated by the virtual certainty that Mobutu would urgently seek aid from the US and other countries. However, these alternative sources would almost

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certainly not fill the gap left by the Belgian cutbacks.
The result would be a further reduction in the effectiveness
of the Mobutu regime. Even if this regime collapsed, there
is no assurance that a successor government would be more
favorably disposed to Belgium.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

Abbot Smith
ABBOT SMITH
Acting Chairman

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